Senate, House Narrow Defense Budget Gap

Negotiators Remain Divided Over Where to Find Funds to Replenish Pentagon Accounts

By Dan Morgan
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Senate negotiators yesterday raised by $1 billion the amount of money they are willing to give the Pentagon to replenish Defense Department coffers drained by recent peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

The Senate move came after a week of closed-door talks with the House on a number of defense-related issues. The talks have narrowed differences between the two chambers over U.S. aid for rehousing Russian rocket forces residing in Ukraine and Belorussia, but left them still divided over the House's determination to terminate the technology reinvestment program, a Clinton administration initiative aimed at promoting technologies that have defense and civilian benefits.

A final deal on the supplemental defense appropriation measure remained stalled over Senate insistence that most of the $2.94 billion in its new replenishment proposal be offset by cuts in lower-priority programs within the Pentagon's own budget. The House wants to add $3.2 billion to the Pentagon.

Republicans in both houses, responding to the deficit-cutting climate, have been forced for the first time in recent memory to refinance the Pentagon in mid-year without worsening the overall federal deficit.

House appropriators acknowledged that in the latest version of their proposal, some $600 million of the added costs would be offset by reductions in non-defense programs.

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But they argued that it was unfair to dun military accounts to make up for the costs of the $1.5 billion operation to restore Jean-Bertrand Aristide as president of Haiti because it was more a foreign policy than a military mission.

The clash over a relatively small amount of money in terms of the overall defense budget has brought out sharp differences between the two houses and has sparked maneuvering between President Clinton and his possible presidential rival in 1996, Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.).

Last week, Dole threatened not to send the defense measure to the White House until Democrats stopped stalling a larger package of cuts in non-defense programs now on the Senate floor. Meanwhile, administration officials have charged Republicans with denying the Pentagon funds needed to retain military readiness.

Yesterday, Dole proposed stripping from the defense bill a provision giving the nation of Jordan $275 million in debt relief, and attaching it as a rider to the spending cuts measure.

Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wis.) charged that Clinton was "being jacked around on the issue of aid to Jordan," and implied that Dole was trying to embarrass the president by putting the Jordan aid in the big spending cuts package—which Clinton has threatened to veto.

The Senate continued yesterday to debate the large spending measure, while the White House and leaders of both parties negotiated on a compromise that could bring an end to debate. Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) has proposed restoring $1.3 billion of funds cut for children and education. Dole has responded with a proposal to make still deeper cuts in funding for public broadcasting, the national service corps and legal services for the poor.

But House and Senate conferees appeared close to a deal on defense spending after beginning their negotiations far apart a week ago.

The Senate-passed defense spending measure approved $1.96 billion to replenish Pentagon accounts drawn down by humanitarian and peacekeeping operations in Haiti, the Caribbean, Bosnia, South Korea, Somalia and Bosnia.

The Senate proposal announced yesterday would give the Pentagon $2.94 billion, only slightly less than the House proposal.

"Let's cut a trade here," said Rep. C.W. Bill Young (R-Fla.), who chairs the Appropriations defense subcommittee in the House.

But his Senate counterpart, Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), said the House proposal was unacceptable because of its reliance on cuts in non-defense programs.

"The Senate guidelines just don't fit your offer," he said. "I just work here."

On another issue, it appeared the Navy had prevailed in its efforts to prevent Senate-proposed cuts in a decades-old program that uses miles

REP. DAVID R. OBEY
. . . Jordan aid is being manipulated

of buried cables in Wisconsin as an antenna to send low-frequency messages to submerged submarines.

Obey, a longtime critic of the program, known as ELF, blasted the Navy for "coming up with yet another classified emergency reason for continuing the funding of this turkey."

But the House appeared to have given ground to the Senate in agreeing to substantially reduce proposed cuts in U.S. aid for rehousing Russian rocket forces in Ukraine and Belorussia, and relocating former Soviet officers from Baltic countries to Russia.